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For Immediate Release

Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month

Pat Kusters, Iowa Master Gardener

A golf ball in my throat. That is what he said. "You have a golf ball size tumor in your thyroid gland and it has to be taken out." So a few months ago, I had a thyroidectomy. I was lucky. Only half my thyroid gland was removed and the tumor was not cancerous. Some are not so fortunate.

How could I have been surprised something that size was growing in my throat? Perhaps because sometimes there are few symptoms of thyroid disorder. Perhaps I was simply unaware that the signs and symptoms I was experiencing clearly suggested thyroid malfunction. I am not alone. It has been estimated that nearly half of all people with thyroid disorders go undiagnosed.

To increase awareness and promote early detection, the Thyroid Cancer Survivor's Association has named September as Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month. Why should we care? Thyroid cancer is the most rapidly increasing cancer in America. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2016 there will be about 64,300 new cases of thyroid cancer in the United States. Of those around 1,980 people will die. The great news is that not all thyroid malfunctions are due to cancer. Only about 1% of all cancers are thyroid cancers, and fewer than 10% of thyroid cysts or tumors are thought to be cancer. And, if detected early, it is usually treatable. That's a big 'if'.

The goal of Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month is to educate about the thyroid gland and its significance; to create awareness of symptoms of thyroid malfunction for early detection; and to inform us of ways we can promote healthy thyroid function.

Located at the base of the throat and only two inches in size, the thyroid gland affects nearly every organ in the body. It regulates fat and carbohydrate metabolism, brain development, the heart and nervous system, body temperature and much more. Signs of thyroid malfunction include excess weight gain or loss, experiencing low energy, hair loss, excessive sweating or difficulty sleeping. If you notice swelling in your neck or have trouble swallowing you should see your doctor. Other factors associated with thyroid cancer include obesity and a family history of thyroid disorders. While it occurs in men and women of all age groups, the incidence is higher in women, those over 40, and anyone having had prior exposure of the thyroid gland to radiation.

To lower your risk of thyroid disorder there are some things we all can do. Eating foods rich in iodine, zinc, magnesium, selenium and vitamins A & D is important for the body to manufacture thyroid hormones. While we all need these nutrients for good health, a serious thyroid issue requires professional help. Unfortunately, thyroid cancer does not always have noticeable warning signs. Be proactive. Have your neck examined at your next physical, and ask to have the protective cover placed over your neck when having dental x-rays.

September is Thyroid Cancer Awareness Month. Be informed, be aware.